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Adams family in Auteuil, 1784-1785



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THE
ADAMS FAMILY
IN AUTEUIL

1784 • 1785

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The
Adams Family
in Auteuil, 1784-1785

*As Told in the Letters of
Abigail Adams*

with an Introduction and Notes by

HOWARD C. RICE, JR.

Massachusetts Historical

Society

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 FOREWORD

"If you and your daughter were with me," John Adams wrote from Paris to his wife in Braintree in April 1783, "I could keep up my spirits; but idly and insipidly as I pass my time, I am weary, worn, and disgusted to death. I had rather chop wood, dig ditches and make fence upon my poor little farm." A man intensely devoted to his family, Adams had now spent five almost continuous years abroad in his country's service, and with some justification he was feeling sorry for himself.

And so, by the end of 1783, it was agreed that Mrs. Adams and their daughter Abigail would come out to join the father and the eldest son of the family in Europe. An added motive was the fact that a young lawyer in Braintree named Royall Tyler was laying siege to daughter Abigail, and her parents thought a cooling-off period desirable. Events proved this to be a wise move.

The present booklet, third in a series of Massachusetts Historical Society "picture books" issued to enliven the Society's Spring receptions, tells in pictures and text the story of this Yankee family's year at the Court of Louis XVI. The Society is greatly indebted to Mr. Howard C. Rice, Jr., Chief of Special Collections in the Princeton University Library and a frequent historical pilgrim in France, for putting together in so skilful and engaging a fashion the materials he has collected to document this chapter of Adams family history.

It was a chapter that of course was often to be repeated, with variations, in the later history of this family of diplomats. But this earliest episode of its kind was the pleasantest of them all, perhaps largely because Abigail Adams, who has never been surpassed as a chronicler of domestic events and manners, is our principal informant about it. In her letters from abroad

we first see a pretty rigid Braintree yardstick applied to everything she encounters, but before long her standard of measurement grows more flexible. Thus the great house at Auteuil, with its forty or fifty rooms, its elegant but impractical furnishings and elaborate gardens requiring a small army of retainers to keep up, naturally outraged her New England notions of propriety and frugality. Yet it is a matter of record that before the Adamsses left Europe in 1788 they had given up all thought of returning to their little cottage and farm mentioned so nostalgically in these letters. Instead, they acquired one of the more imposing gentlemen's country seats, with a handsome garden and grounds, on the great road to Boston. They provided it with French furniture and English china, and during intervals in public service at home and abroad they and their descendants occupied it until well into the twentieth century.

Both the Old House in modern Quincy (now the Adams National Historic Site) and the extensive family archives now in the Massachusetts Historical Society record in rich detail the peregrinations of the Adamsses from George Washington's time to Calvin Coolidge's. The Society's reception in 1956 seemed a good occasion to show some of the more colorful of these records. With the indispensable assistance of Mrs. Walter M. Whitehill, an exhibition of manuscripts, books, drawings, photographs, and memorabilia has therefore been arranged under the title of *The Adams Family Abroad*. It will be on view at the reception on 18 May as well as during the meeting in Cambridge of the American Association of University Presses the following week.

L. H. BUTTERFIELD

Editor-in-Chief, The Adams Papers

The
Adams Family
in *Auteuil*

"REMOVED TO AUTEUIL," John Adams noted in his diary on 17 August 1784, "at the house of the Comte de Rouault, opposite the *Conduit*. The house, the garden, the situation, near the *Bois de Boulogne*, elevated above the river Seine and the low grounds, and distant from the putrid streets of Paris, is the best I could wish for." This new "situation" was also bracing to John Adams for another reason quite unrelated to air and altitude. For the first time in nearly five years he was united with his family—with his wife Abigail, and two of his children, John Quincy (then aged seventeen) and young Abby (aged nineteen). As one of the American commissioners for negotiating a peace treaty, Adams had been sent to Paris in the autumn of 1779, and had also served as minister in Holland. After the Peace Treaty was signed in September 1783, he was ordered to remain in Europe to collaborate with Dr. Franklin and Mr. Jefferson in negotiating commercial treaties. Realizing that his official duties would thus require a still longer residence abroad, John Adams prevailed upon his somewhat reluctant wife to join him.

So it was that Abigail Adams, accompanied by her daughter Abigail, sailed from Boston in June 1784 on board the ship *Active*. A month later they were in London, where they were soon joined by John Quincy, now a full-grown man whom his

mother at first scarcely recognized, and then by their husband and father who had been anxiously awaiting them in The Hague. John Adams said he now felt twenty years younger, and the family's journey to Paris was the first he ever looked forward to with pleasure since he had come abroad. On 13 August 1784, the Adams family reached Paris, stopped for a few days at the Hôtel d'York in the Rue Jacob, and then, on the 17th, moved to the house at Auteuil.

The Adamses lived here for the better part of a year—from August 1784 to late May 1785, when they moved on to London where John Adams assumed his duties as the first American minister to the Court of Saint James. Father and mother, son and daughter, all kept diaries and all wrote letters to friends at home, so that this American family's residence in a suburb of the French capital is unusually well recorded. Their descriptions of the sights and sounds (and odors) of Paris, of American friends and visitors like Franklin and Jefferson, of French personalities like the Marquis and Marquise de Lafayette, Madame Helvétius and the Duchesse de La Rochefoucauld, of other foreign diplomats like the Baron de Staël, still make lively reading, but since our purpose here is only to evoke the house where the family lived, we must forego the pleasure of extensive quotation, and refer our readers for the larger picture to the published letters and diary of John Adams, to the letters of his wife Abigail, to young Abby's journal and correspondence, and to John Quincy's diary (as yet incompletely published for this period).

The house once occupied by the Adamses is still standing, at numbers 43-47 Rue d'Auteuil in the sixteenth arrondissement of Paris. Few of those who now pass daily alongside the high iron grating which today separates the "courtyard" from the busy street, are aware that a sizeable garden stretches behind the house. This garden, bounded by the Rues Boileau

and Michel-Ange and by the Rue Molitor, is now overshadowed by modern apartment-houses, and the "five acres" known to the Adamses have been considerably reduced by the encroaching streets. Auteuil itself is now an integral part of Paris and no longer the rural retreat that it was in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when Boileau, Molière and other famous men had country villas there. The house at 43-47 Rue d'Auteuil, one of the few survivors from this earlier day, is singled out for brief mention in current guides to "old Paris"—not, however, as the one-time residence of the Adams family, but rather because of two still earlier residents, the Demoiselles Verrières.¹

Marie and Claudine-Geneviève de Verrières (nées Rainteau) occupy a considerable place in the *chronique scandaleuse* of eighteenth-century Paris, for, as one of their latter-day chroniclers has put it, "Les Verrières comptaient les plus grands noms de France dans le volumineux dossier de leurs amours." The private theatre which stood on the grounds of their estate at Auteuil has been the subject of learned research, while one of the two sisters, Marie—her portrait by Drouais now reposes in the Metropolitan Museum in New York!—has acquired a further claim upon posterity as the great-grandmother of the nineteenth-century bluestocking, George Sand.²

This is not, however, the place to explore the "volumineux dossier" of the Demoiselles Verrières. Their house had already—in 1767—passed to the Comte de Rouhault, from whom the Adamses rented it. The Adamses neither knew them, nor would they, to paraphrase Mrs. Adams, "have cared to know

¹ Rochegude and Dumolin, *Guide pratique à travers le Vieux Paris*, Paris, 1923, p. 370; *Paris, Guide du Pneu Michelin*, Paris, 1952/3, "promenade no. 39."

² Further information on the Demoiselles Verrières will be found in: Adolphe Jullien, *Le Théâtre des Demoiselles Verrières, la Comédie de société dans le monde galant du siècle dernier*, Paris, 1875; Gaston Maugras, *Les Demoiselles Verrières*, new edition, Paris, 1904; A. Doniol, *Histoire du XVI^e Arrondissement de Paris*, Paris, 1902.

them." Furthermore, the dossier of the Demoiselles Verrières provides no specific details about the house. They were not, after all, home bodies—in the New England sense of the word—and so it is to the letters of a temporary American occupant of the house that we must turn for the most complete surviving description of this particular "old house in Paris." Indeed, Abigail Adams's account of it is so full and so entertaining that we can at this point allow her to continue the story in her own words. This is not only the story of a house and the portrait of an American diplomat's wife abroad, but also one of the earliest versions we possess of a drama that has been played many times, even down to the present day—that of the American woman struggling with housekeeping problems in Paris.

The photographs included as an accompaniment to Abigail Adams's description depict a house and garden which have changed considerably since she knew them. It is likely that many of the decorative details—the garden ornaments and the balustrades, for example—were added by later antiquarian-minded occupants. These views were taken in recent years when the house was unoccupied, so that they inevitably convey the impression of a "romantically" neglected spot, rather than the clipped and blooming garden that Abigail Adams took leave of a hundred and seventy-one years ago.

❖ 1 ❖ *Abigail Adams to her sister, Mrs. Cranch*

Auteuil, distant from Paris four miles
5 September 1784

It is now the 5th of September, and I have been at this place more than a fortnight; but I have had so many matters to arrange, and so much to attend to, since I left London, that I have scarcely touched a pen. . . .

Auteuil is a village four miles distant from Paris, and one from Passy. The house we have taken is large, commodious, and agreeably situated, near the Woods of Boulogne, which belong to the King, and which Mr. Adams calls his park, for he walks an hour or two every day in them. The house is much larger than we have need of; upon occasion, forty beds may be made in it. I fancy it must be very cold in winter. There are few houses with the privilege which this enjoys, that of having the saloon, as it is called, the apartment where we receive company, upon the first floor. This room is very elegant, and about a third larger than General Warren's hall. The dining-room is upon the right hand, and the saloon upon the left, of the entry, which has large glass doors opposite to each other, one opening into the court, as they call it, the other into a large and beautiful garden. Out of the dining-room you pass through an entry into the kitchen, which is rather small for so large a house. In this entry are stairs which you ascend, at the top of which is a long gallery fronting the street, with six windows, and, opposite to each window, you open into the chambers which all look into the garden.

But with an expense of thirty thousand livres in looking-glasses, there is no table in the house better than an oak board, nor a carpet belonging to the house. The floors I abhor, made of red tiles in the shape of Mrs. Quincy's floor-cloth tiles. These floors will by no means bear water, so that the method of cleaning them is to have them waxed, and then a manservant with foot-brushes drives round your room dancing here and there like a Merry Andrew. This is calculated to take from your foot every atom of dirt, and leave the room in a few moments as he found it. . . . The dining-rooms, of which you make no other use, are laid with small stones, like the red tiles for shape and size. The servants' apartments are generally upon the first floor, and the stairs which you commonly have to ascend to get into the family apartments are so dirty,

that I have been obliged to hold up my clothes, as though I was passing through a cow-yard.

I have been but little abroad. It is customary in this country for strangers to make the first visit. As I cannot speak the language, I think I should make rather an awkward figure. I have dined abroad several times with Mr. Adams's particular friends, the Abbés, who are very polite and civil, three sensible and worthy men.³ The Abbé de Mably has lately published a book, which he has dedicated to Mr. Adams. This gentleman is nearly eighty years old; the Abbé Chalut, seventy-five; and Arnoux, about fifty, a fine, sprightly man, who takes great pleasure in obliging his friends. Their apartments were really nice. I have dined once at Dr. Franklin's,⁴ and once at Mr. Barclay's, our consul,⁵ who has a very agreeable woman for a wife, and where I feel like being with a friend. Mrs. Barclay has assisted me in my purchases, gone with me to different shops, &c. To-morrow I am to dine at Monsieur Grand's;⁶ but I have really felt so happy within doors, and am so pleasingly situated, that I have had little inclination to change the scene. I have not been to one public amusement as yet, not even the opera, though we have one very near us.⁷

³ The Abbés Chalut and Arnoux occupied a house on the heights of Passy, overlooking the Seine, not far from Franklin's residence. A view from their house, sketched in 1786 by John Trumbull, is reproduced in Trumbull's *Autobiography* (1841), facing page 116. The Abbé de Mably's work, *Observations sur le Gouvernement et les Loix des Etats-Unis d'Amérique* (Amsterdam, 1784), is cast in the form of four letters, dated from Passy, July and August 1783, and addressed to "Mr. Adams, Ministre-Plénipotentiaire des Etats-Unis en Hollande & pour les Negotions [*sic*] de la Paix générale."

⁴ Franklin lived in Passy in a pavilion on the grounds of the Hôtel Valentinois, the residence of Leray de Chaumont—a site corresponding to present no. 66 Rue Raynouard. Franklin left Passy on his way home to America in July 1785, not long after the Adamses had left Auteuil for London.

⁵ Thomas Barclay of Philadelphia (1728-1793) was at this time United States consul in France and commissioner of accounts.

⁶ Ferdinand Grand was the banker for the United States government.

You may easily suppose I have been fully employed, beginning house-keeping anew, and arranging my family to our no small expense and trouble; for I have had bed-linen and table-linen to purchase and make, spoons and forks to get made of silver, three dozen of each, besides tea furniture, china for the table, servants to procure, &c. The expense of living abroad, I always supposed to be high, but my ideas were nowise adequate to the thing. I could have furnished myself in the town of Boston, with everything I have, twenty or thirty per cent. cheaper than I have been able to do it here. Every thing which will bear the name of elegant, is imported from England, and, if you will have it, you must pay for it, duties and all. I cannot get a dozen handsome wine-glasses under three guineas, nor a pair of small decanters for less than a guinea and a half. The only gauze fit to wear is English, at a crown a yard; so that really a guinea goes no further than a copper with us. For this house, garden, stables, &c., we give two hundred guineas a year. Wood is two guineas and a half per cord; coal, six livres the basket of about two bushels; this article of firing, we calculate at one hundred guineas a year. The difference between coming upon this negotiation to France and remaining at The Hague, where the house was already furnished at the expense of a thousand pounds sterling,⁸ will increase the expense here to six or seven hundred guineas; at a time, too, when Congress have cut off five hun-

⁷ Mrs. Adams is probably referring to the Comédie du Bois de Boulogne, which John Quincy and Abby attended on 21 August, according to the latter's journal. Cf. L. V. Thiéry, *Guide des Amateurs et des Etrangers voyageurs à Paris*, Paris, 1787, I, 16.

⁸ In 1782 John Adams purchased a house in The Hague, thenceforth known as the Hôtel des Etats-Unis d'Amérique, situated on the east side of the Fluweelen Burgwal. When he left Holland he allowed the U.S. agent C. W. F. Dumas and his family to live there. The house was demolished in 1829. A commemorative plaque in the entrance hall of the Landsdrukkerij (the Netherlands Government Printing Office), which now occupies the site, recalls Adams's former residence there.

dred guineas from what they have heretofore given. For our coachman and horses alone, (Mr. Adams purchased a coach in England), we give fifteen guineas a month. It is the policy of this country to oblige you to a certain number of servants, and one will not touch what belongs to the business of another, though he or she has time enough to perform the whole. In the first place, there is a coachman who does not an individual thing but attend to the carriages and horses; then the gardener, who has business enough; then comes the cook; then the *maître d'hôtel*; his business is to purchase articles in the family, and oversee, that nobody cheats but himself; a *valet de chambre*,—John⁹ serves in this capacity; a *femme de chambre*,—Esther serves in this line, and is worth a dozen others; a *coiffeuse*,—for this place I have a French girl about nineteen, whom I have been upon the point of turning away, because Madame will not brush a chamber; “it is not de fashion, it is not her business.” I would not have kept her a day longer, but found, upon inquiry, that I could not better myself, and hair-dressing here is very expensive, unless you keep such a madam in the house. She sews tolerably well, so I make her as useful as I can. She is more particularly devoted to Mademoiselle. Esther diverted me yesterday evening, by telling me that she heard her go muttering by her chamber door after she had been assisting Abby in dressing. “Ah, mon Dieu, ’t is provoking,”—(she talks a little English).—“Why, what is the matter, Pauline, what is provoking?”—“Why, Mademoiselle look so pretty, I, so mauvais.” There is another indispensable servant, who is called a *frotteur*; his business is to rub the floors.

We have a servant who acts as *maître d'hôtel*, whom I like at present, and who is so very gracious as to act as footman too, to save the expense of another servant, upon condition that we give him a gentleman’s suit of clothes in lieu of a

⁹ John and Esther were the Adams’s American servants.



1. *Abigail Adams. Oil portrait by Ralph Earl, 1785*



2. Auteuil (left) and Passy, from the Isle des Cygnes, ca.1785



4. The "Hôtel de Verrières," courtyard side, Rue d'Auteuil



5. "Glass doors . . . opening . . . into a large and beautiful garden."



6. *"Luxury and folly are strong, and characteristic traits of the builder."*



7. *"The garden, too, is much out of repair . . ."*



8. *"The garden, Betsey! let me take a look at it . . ."*



9. *"A beautiful walk in summer . . ."*



10. *"That calm retreat . . ."*



11. "Little images carved in stone . . ."



12. "The garden has a number of statues and figures . . ."

livery. Thus, with seven servants and hiring a charwoman upon occasion of company, we may possibly make out to keep house; with less, we should be hooted at as ridiculous, and could not entertain any company. To tell this in our own country, would be considered as extravagance; but would they send a person here in a public character to be a public jest? At lodgings in Paris last year, during Mr. Adams's negotiations for a peace, it was as expensive to him as it is now at house-keeping, without half the accommodations.

Washing is another expensive article; the servants are all allowed theirs, besides their wages; our own costs us a guinea a week. I have become steward and book-keeper, determined to know with accuracy what our expenses are, and to prevail with Mr. Adams to return to America, if he finds himself straitened, as I think he must be. Mr. Jay went home because he could not support his family here with the whole salary; what then can be done, curtailed as it now is, with the additional expense? Mr. Adams is determined to keep as little company as he possibly can, but some entertainments we must make, and it is no unusual thing for them to amount to fifty or sixty guineas at a time. More is to be performed by way of negotiation, many times, at one of these entertainments, than at twenty serious conversations; but the policy of our country has been, and still is, to be penny-wise and pound-foolish. We stand in sufficient need of economy, and, in the curtailment of salaries, I suppose they thought it absolutely necessary to cut off their foreign ministers. But, my own interest apart, the system is bad; for that nation which degrades their own ministers by obliging them to live in narrow circumstances, cannot expect to be held in high estimation themselves. We spend no evenings abroad, make no suppers, attend very few public entertainments, or spectacles, as they are called, and avoid every expense that is not held indispensable. Yet I cannot but think it hard, that a gentleman who has devoted so great a

part of his life to the service of the public, who has been the means, in a great measure, of procuring such extensive territories to his country, who saved their fisheries, and who is still laboring to procure them further advantages, should find it necessary so cautiously to calculate his pence, for fear of overrunning them. I will add one more expense. There is now a Court mourning, and every foreign minister, with his family, must go into mourning for a Prince of eight years old, whose father is an ally to the King of France. This mourning is ordered by the Court, and is to be worn eleven days only. Poor Mr. Jefferson¹⁰ had to hie away for a tailor to get a whole black suit made up in two days; and at the end of eleven days, should another death happen, he will be obliged to have a new suit of mourning, of cloth, because that is the season when silk must be left off. We may groan and scold, but these are expenses which cannot be avoided; for fashion is the deity everyone worships in this country, and, from the highest to the lowest, you must submit. Even poor John and Esther had no comfort amongst the servants, being constantly the subjects of their ridicule, until we were obliged to direct them to have their hair dressed. Esther had several crying fits upon the occasion, that she should be forced to be so much of a fool; but there was no way to keep them from being trampled upon but this; and now that they are *à la mode de Paris*, they are much respected. To be out of fashion is more criminal than to be seen in a state of nature, to which the Parisians are not averse. . . .

I long to hear from you. House and garden, with all its decorations, are not so dear to me as my own little cottage, connected with the society I used there to enjoy; for, out of my own family, I have no attachments in Europe, nor do I

¹⁰ Jefferson had sailed from Boston on 5 July 1784 and reached Paris on 6 August. In October of the same year he took a house in the Cul-de-sac Taitbout, where he lived during the period that the Adamses were in Auteuil.

think I ever shall have. As to the language, I speak it a little, bad grammar and all; but I have so many French servants, that I am under a necessity of trying. Could you, my sister, and my dear cousins, come and see me as you used to do, walk in the garden and delight yourselves in the alcoves and arbours, I should enjoy myself much better. . . .

❖ 2 ❖ *Abigail Adams to her niece, Betsey Cranch*

Auteuil, 5 September 1784

I am situated at a small desk in an apartment about two thirds as large as your own little chamber; this apartment opens into my lodging chamber, which is handsome and commodious, and is upon a range with six or seven others, all of which look into the garden. My chamber is hung with a rich India patch,¹¹ the bed, chairs and window curtains of the same, which is very fashionable in this country. Two handsome bureaus with marble tops make up the furniture, which wants only the addition of a carpet to give it all an air of elegance; but in lieu of this is a tile floor in the shape of Mrs. Quincy's carpet, with the red much worn off and defaced, the dust of which you may suppose not very favorable to a long train; but since I came we have been at the expense of having several of the floors new painted; this is done with Spanish-brown and glue, afterwards with melted wax and then rubbed with a hard brush, upon which a man sets his foot and with his arms akimbo, stripped to his shirt, goes driving round your room. . . . There are some floors of wood which re-

¹¹ The hangings and upholstery material described here by Mrs. Adams as "India patch," and elsewhere as "copper plate," were undoubtedly the fashionable *indiennes*, the printed textiles also known by the generic term of *toiles de Jouy* from the name of one of the most important factories making them, that of Oberkampf at Jouy-en-Josas. One of these *toiles* has supplied the cover design of the present booklet.

semble our black walnut; these are made of small strips of wood about six inches wide, and placed in squares, which are rubbed with wax and brushes in the same manner I have before described. Water is an article very sparingly used. I procured a woman when I first came, (for the house was excessively dirty), to assist Esther in cleaning. I desired her to wash up the dining-room floor, which is of stone made in the same shape of the tile, so she turned a pail of water down and took a house brush and swept it out. You would think yourself poisoned until time reconciled you to it. I have, however, got this place to look more like neatness than any thing I have yet seen.

What a contrast this is to The Hague! The garden, Betsey! let me take a look at it; it is delightful, such a beautiful collection of flowers all in bloom, so sweetly arranged with rows of orange-trees and china vases of flowers; why you would be in raptures! It is square and contains about five acres of land. About a third of the garden is laid out in oblongs, octagons, circles, &c., filled with flowers; upon each side are spacious walks, with rows of orange-trees and pots of flowers, then a small walk and a wall covered with grape vines; in the middle of the garden a fountain of water, in a circle walled about two feet, and a thin circle of fence painted green, in the midst of which are two little images carved in stone; upon each side and at a proper distance are two small alcoves filled with curious plants, exotics, and around these are placed pots of flowers, which have a most agreeable appearance; then a small open Chinese fence, covered with grape vines and wall fruit, encloses two spots upon each side, containing vegetables surrounded by orange trees which prevent your view of them until you walk to them. At the bottom of the garden are a number of trees, the branches of which unite and form beautiful arbours; the tops of the trees are cut all even enough to walk upon them, and look, as I sit now at the window, like

one continued tree through the whole range. There is a little summer-house covered by this thicket, beautiful in ruins; two large alcoves, in which are two statues, terminate the vines; the windows of all the apartments in the house, or rather glass doors, reaching from the top to the bottom and opening in the middle, give one a full and extensive view of the garden.

This is a beautiful climate, soft, serene, and temperate; but *Paris*, you must not ask me how I like it, because I am going to tell you of the pretty little apartment next to this in which I am writing. Why, my dear, you cannot turn yourself in it without being multiplied twenty times; now that I do not like, for being rather clumsy, and by no means an elegant figure, I hate to have it so often repeated to me. This room is about ten or twelve feet large, is eight-cornered and panelled with looking-glasses; a red and white India patch, with pretty borders encompasses it; low back stuffed chairs with garlands of flowers encircling them, adorn this little chamber; festoons of flowers are round all the glasses; a lustre hangs from the ceiling adorned with flowers; a beautiful sofa is placed in a kind of alcove, with pillows and cushions in abundance, the use of which I have not yet investigated; in the top of this alcove, over the sofa in the ceiling is another glass; here is a beautiful chimney-piece, with an elegant painting of rural life in a country farm-house, lads and lasses jovial and happy. This little apartment opens into your cousin's bed-chamber; it has a most pleasing view of the garden, and it is that view which always brings my dear Betsey to my mind, and makes me long for her to enjoy the delights of it with me. In this apartment I sit and sew, while your uncle is engaged at Passy, where the present negotiations are carried on, and your cousin John in his apartment translating Latin, your cousin Abby in her chamber writing, in which she employs most of her time. She has been twice to the Opera with her brother, of which I suppose, she will write you an account.

The present owner of this house, and the builder of it,¹² is a M. le Comte de Rouhaut; he married young, a widow worth 1,800,000 livres per annum, £80,000 sterling, which in the course of a few years they so effectually dissipated, that they had not £100,000 sterling remaining; they have been since that separated; by some inheritances and legacies the Count is now worth about a hundred thousand livres per annum, and the Countess seventy-five thousand. They have a theatre in this house now gone to decay, where for eight years together they played comedies and tragedies, twice a week, and gave entertainments at the same time, which cost them £200 sterling every time they entertained between four and five hundred persons at a time. The looking-glasses in this house, I have been informed, cost 300,000 livres. Under this chamber which I have described to you, is a room of the same bigness, in which is an elegant bathing convenience let into the floor, and this room is encompassed with more glass than the chamber, the ceiling being entirely of glass; here, too, is a sofa surrounded with curtains. Luxury and folly are strong, and characteristic traits of the builder. There are apartments of every kind in this house, many of which I have never yet entered; those for which I have a use are calculated for the ordinary purposes of life, and further I seek not to know. . . . Adieu. I hear the carriage. Your uncle is come. I go to hasten tea, of which he is still fond.

✧ 3 ✧ *Abigail Adams to her niece, Betsey Cranch*

13 December 1784

. . . If it will be any satisfaction to you to know where this letter is written, I will tell you, in your cousin John's cham-

¹² Mrs. Adams was apparently misinformed. The Comte de Rouhaut was not the builder of the house, which dated from the early part of the century; he had purchased it from the Demoiselles Verrières in 1767.

ber; he is writing at his desk, and I at a table by the fire. It is customary in this country to live upon the second floor; there are a row of chambers the length of the house, which all look into the garden. In the first, which makes one corner of the house, I am now writing; it is lined in the same manner as if it was paper, with a blue and white chintz; the bed curtains, window curtains, and chairs of the same. . . . There is a little apartment belonging to this chamber, about as large as your library, which has a sofa of red and white copper-plate and six chairs of the same. . . . Between this chamber and the next, is the staircase, upon the other side of which is the chamber in which we all associate together when we are not in our separate rooms; this is properly your uncle's room, because there he writes and receives his forenoon company. . . . Next to that is a chamber called an anti-chamber. . . . Out of this you go into my lodging-chamber, which is large and furnished in the same style with the others, only that the figures are all Chinese, horrid looking creatures! Out of my chamber, all in the same row, is a little room for a dressingroom and one of the same kind next to it, which is in warm weather my writing-room, having two little book cases and a small escritoire; next to that is the delicious little apartment I formerly told you of, and then your cousin Abby's apartment which makes the other corner of the house.

There are very clever apartments, up the second pair of stairs, over these chambers, but they are out of repair; there are two wings in which there are a number of chambers; in one of which Esther and Pauline keep, always having a fire to themselves. Who, say you, is Pauline? Why, she is your cousin's chamber-maid and our hair-dresser; every lady here must have a female hair-dresser, so these girls serve an apprenticeship to the business like any other trade, and give from five to eight guineas for their learning, then they are qualified to dress a lady, make her bed and sew a very little.

I have, however, got this one to lay aside some of her airs and become a very clever girl. Whilst Esther was sick she was as kind to her and as careful as if she was her sister, watching with her night after night; the cook, too, upon this occasion was very kind; and Pauline has undertaken to teach Esther to dress hair, which will be a vast advantage to me, if, as I fear, I shall be obliged to go away this winter; it is very unpleasant to break up a house, to part with one's servants, and to set all afloat, not knowing where your next residence will be. . . . Enter Miss Pauline—"Madame, vous allez faire mettre des papillottes à vos cheveux aujourd'hui. Il est midi, oui, je viens,"—so you see my pen must be laid aside for this important business. . . .

❖ 4 ❖ *Abigail Adams to her sister, Mrs. Shaw*

14 December 1784

. . . This village where we reside, is four miles from Paris, and is famous for nothing that I know of, but the learned men who have inhabited it. Such were Boileau, Molière, D'Aguesseau, and Helvétius.¹³ The first and last lived near this hotel, and Boileau's garden is preserved as a choice relic. As to my own health, it is much as usual. I suffer through want of exercise, and grow too fat. I cannot persuade myself to walk an hour in the day, in a long entry which we have, merely for exercise; and as to the streets, they are continually a quagmire. No walking there without boots or wooden shoes, neither of which are my feet calculated for. Mr. Adams

¹³ Madame Helvétius, the writer's widow, who was a close friend of Franklin's, still lived here. Her house, no longer in existence, stood on a site corresponding to present no. 59 Rue d'Auteuil, not far to the west and on the same side of the street as the one occupied by the Adams family. Both Mrs. Adams and her daughter have left amusing descriptions of Madame Helvétius.

makes it his constant practice to walk several miles every day, without which he would not be able to preserve his health, which at best is but infirm. He professes himself so much happier for having his family with him, that I feel amply gratified in having ventured across the ocean. He is determined that nothing but the inevitable stroke of death shall in future separate him at least from one part of it; so that I know not what climates I may yet have to visit,—more, I fear, than will be agreeable to either of us. . . .

❖ 5 ❖ *Abigail Adams to her niece, Betsey Cranch*

Auteuil, 8 March 1785

. . . Tell me when you begin to garden; I can brag over you in that respect, for our flower-pots were set out in February, and our garden began to look smiling. The orange-trees were not, however, brought out of the house, and it was very lucky they were not, for since this month commenced, came a nipping frost, very unusual at this season, and stiffened all our flower-roots. I really fear they are killed. Oh, Betsey, how you would delight in this garden! As for the house, it is large, and with twenty thousand livres of expense in repairs and furniture, would be very elegant, and fit for a minister to live in; but as it is, let it pass, it is as good as we can afford, and has a fine clear air. The garden, too, is much out of repair, and bespeaks the extravagant profusion of its owners, who are not able to put it in order. The garden is, however, a beautiful walk in summer, and the beautiful variety of flowers would tempt you to tan yourself in picking and trimming them. The garden has a number of statues and figures, but there is none that pleases me more than one of a boy who has robbed a bird of her nest of young, which he holds in one hand, and in the

other the old bird, who has laid hold of his finger with her bill, and is biting it furiously, so that the countenance of the lad is in great distress, between the fear of losing the young, and the pain of his finger.

Cousin Abby says, "Madam, the company have come, some of them." "Well, then, go down and entertain them; for I will finish my letter to Betsey." . . .

✧ 6 ✧ *Abigail Adams to her sister, Mrs. Shaw*

Auteuil, 8 May 1785

I do not expect to date you any more letters from this place. Delightful and blooming garden, how much I shall regret your loss! The fish-pond and the fountain are just put in order; the trees are in blossom, and the flowers are coming on in succession; the forest trees are new clad in green, several beautiful rows of which form arched bowers at the bottom of our garden, the tops being cut so that they look like one continued plain; their leaves and branches entwine, and shade you entirely from the rays of the sun. It will not be easy to find in the midst of the city so charming a scene. . . .

I had hopes that another year's wanderings would have put an end to our pilgrimage. You can hardly form an idea how difficult and expensive it is to be housekeeping a few months at a time in so many different countries. It has been Mr. Adams's fortune, ever since he came abroad, not to live a year at a time in one place. At The Hague he has a house and furniture, but they could not be removed five hundred miles; therefore it was necessary to hire a house and furniture here, to buy table linen, bed linen, china, glass, and plate. Here we have resided eight months, and now we must quit this for England. Removal in these countries is not so easy as in ours; for, however well you may pack up your things for the pur-

pose, they must undergo so many scrutinies, besides paying heavy duties for passing from one country to another. . . .

❖7❖ *Abigail Adams to her sister, Mrs. Cranch*

Auteuil, 8 May 1785

Can my dear sister realize that it is near eleven months since I left her? To me it seems incredible; more like a dream than a reality. Yet it ought to appear the longest ten months of my life, if I were to measure the time by the variety of objects which have occupied my attention; but, amidst them all, my heart returns, like the dove of Noah, and rests only in my native land. I never thought myself so selfish a being as since I have become a traveller; for, although I see nature around me in a much higher state of cultivation than our own country can boast, and elegance of taste and manners in a thousand forms, I cannot feel interested in them: it is vain for me, that here

“kind Nature wakes her genial power,
Suckles each herb, and nurtures every flower.”

’T is true the garden yields a rich profusion; but they are neither plants of my hands, nor children of my care. I have bought a little bird lately, and I really think I feel more attached to that, than to any object out of my own family, animate or inanimate. . . .

❖8❖ *Abigail Adams to Thomas Jefferson*

London, Bath Hotel, Westminster

Dear Sir

June 6, 1785

Mr. Adams has already written you that we arrived in London upon the 27. of May. We journey’d slowly and sometimes

silently. I think I have somewhere met with the observation that nobody ever leaves Paris but with a degree of tristeness. I own I was loth to leave my garden because I did not expect to find its place supplied. . . .

At leaving Auteuil our domesticks surrounded our carriage and in tears took leave of us, which gave us that painfull kind of pleasure, which arises from a consciousness, that the good will of our dependants is not misplaced.

My little bird I was obliged, after taking it into the carriage to resign to my Parisian chamber maid, or the poor thing would have fluttered itself to death. I mourned its loss, but its place was happily supplied by a present of two others which were given me on board the Dover packet, by a young gentleman whom we had received on board with us, and who being excessively sick I admitted into the cabin, in gratitude for which he insisted upon my accepting a pair of his birds. As they had been used to travelling I brought them here in safety, for which they hourly repay me by their melodious notes. When we arrived we went to our old lodgings at the Adelphia, but could not be received as it was full, and almost every other hotel in the city. From thence we came to the Bath Hotel where we at present are. . . . The four rooms which we occupy costs a third more than our house garden and stables &c. did at Auteuil. I had lived so quietly in that calm retreat, that the noise and bustle of this proud city almost turned my brain for the first two or three days. My time has been much taken up since my arrival in looking out for a house. I could find many which would suit in all respects but the price, but none really fit to occupy under 240 £.250. besides the taxes which are serious matters here. At last I found one in Grovenor Square which we have engaged. . . .

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Complete texts of the letters by Abigail Adams, designated here as nos. 1-7, will be found in: *Letters of Mrs. Adams, The Wife of John Adams*, with an Introductory Memoir by her Grandson, Charles Francis Adams, Fourth edition, revised and enlarged, Boston, 1848. Numbers 2, 3, and 5 were published *only* in this fourth revised edition, and will not be found in the earlier editions. No. 8 is printed in: Julian P. Boyd, ed., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, VIII, 171-181, Princeton, 1953.

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